

## What is the University?

The university is a central institution in maintaining the growth and development of advanced industrial capitalist society. Its function is threefold: 1) It trains future technicians, service workers and bureaucrats for positions in society; 2) It provides the technical and scientific resources for research to improve production, administration and the military; and 3) It furnishes the ideological rationale for the legitimation of established authority. The university is no longer--if it ever really was--a 'community of scholars in pursuit of disinterested knowledge.' Disinterested knowledge cannot exist in the midst of interested forces. These forces, which control American society, require the capabilities of the modern multi-university. What Clark Kerr says is right: "The Welfare-society university is tied to the forces and existence of society at large. . . the university and segments of industry are becoming more and more alike." The needs of corporate capitalism subordinate human needs and values to profit and bureaucratic efficiency. The critical function of the university is

### A Mirror-Image

What assures that the university reflects dominant interests of society? As the signs on campus constantly remind us, the University is "The Property of the Regents." Symbolically and actually they own and use the University as a knowledge factory for the production of the manpower, information, and commitment necessary to maintain their position of wealth and power in society. They are not alone. The Federal Government, foundations, and other corporate interests impose their objectives on the University through the system of funding and research grants. The University is thus subject to a structure of financial control and political influence which determines the content of education.

### The Production of Ideology

One of the ways that the University serves the ruling interests in society is through the vision of society purveyed in the university. This vision consists of a rather unsystematic set of themes which together constitute 'liberal ideology.' As the multiversity comes more closely to resemble a large business concern, academic liberalism and corporate liberalism begin to merge. Thus liberal ideology asserts that the public domain (of which the university and establishment politics are two important sectors) is the arena for the peaceful competition of the plural interests (Clark Kerr's "the many publics") of society. Competition must remain peaceful, and for the sake of containing social conflict academic sociology has produced an entire field concerned with normative social control and 'conflict management.' Not only is the university the source for many of these ideas, but in its curricula it indoctrinates the student with the view of a basically beneficent, if imperfect, social order.

### THE IDEOLOGY OF PRODUCTION

Education has come to be defined by those who control the university, and by those who justify that control, to mean the mechanical accumulation of specific skills and facts. Armed with these facts and skills, the university graduate can fit into the structure of society. But, lacking an understanding of their relevance, and humane use, he remains uneducated. In short, the student is trained



to be an uncritical instrument of the society which uses him. He is the raw material to be shaped into a useful product which will fill some need in society.

The student attends the university to learn from a professor, a teaching assistant, a book. His experience there is often socially alienating because he remains distant from both faculty and his fellow students. Intellectually he becomes estranged because much of what he studies is uninteresting and irrelevant to his life. The student is seen and often feels himself to be inferior to his teacher. Yet this inferiority exists only within the context of the teachers command over certain skills and facts. The student brings fresh ideas and the experience of having grown up in a changed society. Given the ideology of 'education as training' and his inferior status, the student's potential contribution is denied and his desire to learn is thwarted.

Although the ideology which sees education as training alienates students, it affords great benefits to the upwardly mobile professor. Such faculty exert a minimum effort in teaching and are encouraged to spend more time securing research grants, writing, advising the government, etc. In essence, the professor is encouraged to market his knowledge outside the university rather than using it to generate interest and understanding in his students. The professor becomes then, an academic entrepreneur, selling his facts and skills which serve to strengthen the interests that control the university and society. For this 'service' he receives money and status; his students receive nothing in return, except the opportunity to become like he is.

### The Students' University

Students have a unique interest in education which is not shared by the faculty, administration, or the industrial state. We form a distinct and particular group which has no interest in maintaining the educational status quo. Rather our interests lie in restructuring the university and the educational process so that they serve to make the individual able to understand himself and his society. Only then will we be able to function in society--not as a cog in a machine, but as a critical human being with the capacity to alter his environment.

The students' university is a critical university; it incorporates an educational process in which critical learning takes place among equals. A critical university resists manipulation or control by oppressive forces in society. This is not to say that it exists to pursue 'disinterested knowledge.' Rather, the understanding generated in a critical university illuminates the needs and interests of the oppressed segments of society. This places the university in a fundamentally critical stance with respect to the dominant ideas, interests, classes, etc. in society, and thus it is at the forefront of continuing change toward a liberated society. The critical university is equalitarian and democratic. This means that the ethnic, political, and economic divisions in society must be accurately reflected in the composition of the faculty and student body. It also means that students and faculty must have equal control over all university matters which affect them, educational and otherwise.

### A Beginning

However, an autonomous and critical university cannot be created in an unfree society. Within the university, we can build zones of liberated students and faculty, such as the C.P.E. or a radical students' union, but these zones must ultimately relate to the fundamental social struggles for human betterment. If they do not, they become an ivory tower within an oppressive institution and are pushed into the corner of irrelevancy, absorbed or coopted. Such emasculation is not possible, however, if students and faculty link their struggles within the



university with the struggles of oppressed humanity in the world at large.

The roots of the critical university lie in our fights for our liberated zones against university participation in oppression. But the restructuring of the present university must not and cannot occur apart from a radical restructuring of society. The roots of a free university will grow only through our fights against society's unfreedoms. The critical university will be brought to fruition by continuing and winning the fight to end racism, imperialism and corporate domination of society. However, a liberated society cannot be created by students alone.

We recognize that the relatively privileged nature of student life (draft deferments, financial aid, promises of social and economic gratification upon graduation) along with its temporary quality places certain limitations on the ability of a student movement to effect fundamental social change. In order to prepare ourselves to carry on the struggle to be a greater challenge to existing institutions we must recognize our communality with other social forces whose interests lie in radically changing society. The student movement has long recognized the Black (and other oppressed minority) liberation movements as one such force.

Less recognized to date by the student movement as a force necessary for radical change is the working class--both the growing numbers of white collar workers (the so-called 'new working class') and the still critical blue collar workers (including those in communication and transportation industries. During the past few years important cracks in the formerly monolithic and stagnant labor movement have begun to appear--most especially among Black, and other minority and young workers. Many students upon leaving the university will become white collar workers (teachers, computer operators, etc.). A radical student movement must begin to build bridges to all sections of the working class to help expand these cracks, and gain a stronger base. The starting point for these bridges is with working class youth--through 'youth culture' as an initial means of communications, through military and G.I. organizing, through taking jobs at and relating to students at predominantly working class schools (trade and technical schools, community and jr. colleges, and high schools) and through working in factories.

There are also ways that we, as radical students within the university, can bring the issue to the working class and its importance before students. When we attack corporations and research for their imperialist activities we must consciously show the ways in which these same institutions exploit and oppress working class people. When we raise the issue of racism we must show students how racism is used by those in power to divide white workers from black workers in order to maintain their power. We can conduct educational campaigns about the relationship between workers and students in France. We can initiate action on issues of mutual self-interest to students and workers, such as rent and taxes.

The distance between the reality of our daily lives and the realizable potential for human fulfillment is vast. In seeing the contradiction between what is and what can be, we have discovered our unfreedom. But we have also discovered the means to free ourselves, for in our oppression the social nature of our condition becomes clear. The consequent necessity for our collective struggle for liberation contains within it the promise of our common and our individual fulfillment.



Speech at 1st Meeting of R.S.U.; January 7, 1969  
by Jack Nicholl

I'm going to attempt to lay out some of the political perspectives which went into the creation of this union. They derive from a combination of political success and failure. I've been on the left, here and at other universities.

Among the greatest failures is our inability to involve large numbers of students on a continuing basis in any form of political activity. And, when students do become involved as in the Cleaver crisis on campus, it is within a crisis context which first, catches us unprepared to offer the education that is needed, and second, which creates an atmosphere of the 'immediate' response or solution. On both counts, the crisis calls on the newly involved student to "harden" his political position and defend it. For many students moving left, the rejection of their hesitation step into politics by committed radicals turns them off and prevents them from evolving through the slow process which most of us experienced. This is not to say that we should allow the vacillations of the uncommitted to determine our course during crisis; rather it demands that we mount projects that can involve students in political struggle on a day to day basis around their own particular interests. (Reconsider the crisis as a radicalizing tool)

Our successes seem to point in a similar direction. The limited successes achieved in departmental organizing among graduates here, plus the more notable success of student organizing in building the Strike at San Francisco State suggest that the best way to involve students is through issues which are closest to their lives. The massive and positive student response to CPE courses should be convincing evidence that students can be reached through issues revolving around the content of their education.

Unfortunately, to some extent both the style and content of radical politics on this campus are inconsistent with our stated goals. For example, we know that the university performs certain crucial functions for the industrial state which emasculate its ability to serve the interests of its students: First, it trains people to become bureaucrats in corporations and public bureaucracies; second, it pays scientists and technicians to do research on problems facing industry, business, and the military; and third, it provides the context in which students about to embark on careers are last exposed in an academic context to the ruling ideology of the American state. We have come to an understanding of these functions and their impact on the university and society at large; but we have been unable to relate this abstract analysis to the daily life of students. We have yet to undertake the massive job of showing to each student how he is being channeled, propagandized, and prepared to serve as an instrument for maintaining established authority. More importantly, radicals have been acting just like the 'distant' professors we despise. We've said, "here is our abstract and global analysis. It is almost impossible to relate to your life and it provides very few guidelines as to how and when to fight, but memorize it and commit your life to it." I believe our analysis is correct and important, but rather than putting the burden on the uncommitted to adhere or remain forever damned, it is our responsibility to make our analysis immediately relevant to every student on this campus.

If there is something new about the Radical Student Union, it involves a commitment to do what we have always known had to be done, hard organizing. It means, essentially that no longer is crisis confrontation enough to educate students and no longer is involvement merely as a soldier carrying out the decisions of a mass meeting enough for the student becoming politically aware. Students want to become involved actively, as equals with more committed radicals, and the movement needs the fresh perspectives and unblemished commitment they can offer. This combination raised some fresh problems which we will have to deal with if we're to be successful.



The biggest problem is what is legitimate action for a Radical Student Union.

In part this problem comes down to the question of trust. If we trust each other, almost any project is worth undertaking. But without trust in each others political perspective, our internal dialogue degenerates into an analysis of individual motivations rather than a critique of the effectiveness of each project in involving students and generating commitment to struggle. In some situations, the question of motivation are important, but we can lay some basic ground rules which should help us understand who we can count on and who we can't. First, we must be certain that none of us hold any form of habitual or other faith that established power will solve our problems for us. Second, in confronting each other, we must be certain that none of us are ignoring or discounting any significant evidence that bears on the problem at hand. Third, in working with each other we must all be confident that each of us will become militant in support of his projects or the union's demands, when necessary. It seems clear that all students who meet these minimum criteria or rationality and commitment are with us, and there will be a lot of them if we take our political perspective seriously.

However, in pursuing our activity we must understand the conflicts which we must resolve. And it is our actions which must resolve them. First, we must both respond to the impact of students who are not as committed as we and protect ourselves from becoming immobilized by their hesitations and confusion. Second, we must both respond to students who in their commitment have become closed to new political perspectives and protect ourselves from the excessive infighting and other forms of political intransigence which either paralyze us or alienate our supporters. Our success in resolving these contradictions will be reflected in our increasing ability to act decisively on a whole range of issues confronting the student in this university.

Generally, we want to move toward a conception of radical activity that permits us to achieve intermediate victories on issues which won't necessarily bring the university to its knees, but which will open up the opportunity of involving students and increasing their commitment for long term struggle. If we come to trust and understand each other's political commitments better, we can say that what seems a minor challenge to the university is in effect important, because if successful it will increase our ability to fight the next time.

What can a radical student union do? First, it can create a group of student organizers who, because they are involved in a number of different projects, are able to involve hundreds of others in continuing political activity. Clearly, such organizers do not sit around and dream up projects and wait for students to come to them. Instead, they go to the students with ideas about how the students themselves can solve some of the problems which afflict them.

The union can encourage a political perspective among its members that leads to supporting rather than discouraging those who are beginning to move left. This does not mean that we immobilize ourselves by acting according to the vacillating or 'do-nothing' attitudes of the conservative or moderate students, but rather that we attempt to get at the roots of the fear, intimidation, and helplessness which more often than not determine a student's politics.

Through its structure, the union can coordinate the diverse political activity which is its main concern and at the same time create the potential for centralizing and focussing on the activity of the union on specific projects in times of crisis.

As a service organization for the radical community (activist), the union can begin to deal with some of the consequences of radical politics, i.e. political defense, bail funds, etc. In one sense this may be the most important function of the union because our success in defending our own is a crucial consideration for many who are otherwise willing to engage in political struggle. In addition, by not protecting our own we create martyrs which may motivate some to greater effort, but in general discourage those who are ready for a smaller commitment.



Finally, the union can serve as a resource base for those who find their natural affinities outside the university, in the community. By lending financial and research support to organizing within the community, we can begin to build the necessary bridges of communication and trust which will lay the basis for struggle long into the future.

As you can see in the description of tentative projects, the practice of this union flows naturally out of the more general political perspective which I have described. At least five of the projects, Departmental Organizing, Education, Institute for Imperialist Studies, The University Business, and the Military (Capitalist Complicity Project), and Academic Restructuring are directly concerned with reaching students as students. These projects not only involve students in arenas where they feel the pinch, but because much of their involvement will be in research and educational activities, they themselves will produce new resources for building a radical movement. Other projects such as the Community Rent and Tax Control, and Price Control On and Off Campus involve student needs, but also relate to the more pressing financial burdens of black people who try to live in Berkeley. The Political Defense and GI Organizing projects aim most directly at the political repression which is gaining such momentum not only in Berkeley but in every community in America.